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ABSTRACT

This handbook is intended to assist North Carolina community colleges in enhancing their online counseling services. Based on reviews of 58 community colleges in North Carolina, along with several state, national, and university web sites, and the collective efforts of a statewide committee, this handbook offers: (1) General tips for improving effective online counseling services; (2) Descriptions and examples of effective online counseling services; (3) Useful questions to ask in designing effective online counseling services; and (4) A resource guide with links to: career information, college connections, counseling sites, financial aid/scholarships, North Carolina community college resources, professional organizations, special needs students, testing, and other links. The authors argue that in the rush to provide online instruction, online counseling services have been neglected. The document offers tips for improving online counseling services, including the following: (1) feature online counseling services prominently; (2) be consistent in design and keep the page simple but informative; (3) ensure that communications are clear and detailed; (4) respond to requests for services within 24-48 hours if possible; (5) create links to and from other relevant pages; (6) maintain a focus upon students' needs; (7) list counselors available; (8) make pages accessible to users with disabilities; and (9) maintain an awareness of security issues. (Contains a listing of 54 online resources.) (NB)

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North Carolina Community College System

Counseling Services Resource Guide

~An internet resource guide for the North Carolina Community College counselor to assist virtual learning studenst~

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Introduction

The goal of this handbook is to assist North Carolina community colleges to enhance their online counseling services. As colleges migrate to the Colleague System, it will be beneficial to evaluate their Student Services program by using the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS), self assessment guide that describes the basic structure and other essential elements of effective programs. In anticipation of the widespread use of CampusCruiser[1] (a component of the Colleague System), community colleges are tasked with personalizing their online counseling services and establishing some guidelines for the delivery of counseling online. Based on reviews of the 58 community colleges in North Carolina (along with several state, national, and university web sites) and the collective efforts of a statewide committee, this handbook provides:

- General tips for improving effective online counseling services
- Descriptions and examples of effective online counseling services
- Useful questions to ask in designing effective online counseling services
- A resource guide with links to: career information, college connections, counseling sites, financial aid/scholarships, North Carolina community college resources, professional organizations, special needs students, testing, and other links.

Internet usage is growing and in the rush to provide instruction online, counseling services online have been neglected[2]. It is important to deliver "anywhere, anytime" online counseling services to not only distance learning students but for the convenience of all students-on campus and off. Furthermore, the Southern Association of Colleges states in article 5.4.1 that "appropriate student development services must be provided for distance learning programs..." Hence, the provision of online counseling services is important and essential to reaffirmation of accreditation.

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[1] http://www.campuscruiser.com/

[2] Western Cooperative for Educational Telecommunications project (http://www.wiche.edu/telecom/resources/publications/guide/guide.htm).

The definition of "counseling services" is neither clear nor universal. In this handbook, counseling services is defined rather narrowly to focus primarily upon those services provided to students by a professional counselor (one with a graduate degree in counseling); these services do not typically involve services for which a license in counseling is required. Counseling services, therefore, do not focus in great detail upon: treatment of mental illness, financial aid, disability services, academic advising, student government, or the admissions/testing process.

General Tips For Improving Effective Online Counseling Services

1. **Feature online counseling services prominently**.
2. **Be consistent in design**. Keep in mind that too many graphics slow the loading of a web page; the site needs to be easy to access for all students…simple but informative.
3. **Ensure that communications are clear and detailed** so that unintended messages are not sent (e.g., Meta linguistic cues such as vocal tone, facial expressions, body language are absent in e-mail communications; hence messages are vulnerable to misinterpretation. Humor, especially sarcasm, can be misinterpreted).
4. **Response to online requests for services is best given within 24-48 hours**.
5. **Remember to create links to and from other relevant pages** throughout the web site of your institution; create links to external sites as well.
6. **Maintain a focus upon students' needs**; this may include offering web pages in a language other than English (see the **Resource Guide** section of this handbook for a listing of web sites that can help developers translate their web sites into languages other than English).
7. **List counselors available**-their phone numbers, e-mail addresses, and physical location on campus.
8. **Ensure that web pages are accessible to users with disabilities**. A good resource is **Bobby**, a free service that analyzes web pages to ensure their accessibility to users with special needs (e.g., providing text equivalents for all images (see the **Resource Guide** section for links to the Bobby web site).
9. **Maintain an awareness of security issues**. Confidential issues can only be shared over the Internet if the server is secure; otherwise only general information can be requested and provided. Only encrypted e-mails are safe; when in doubt about the encryption of e-mail it is best to ensure information provided is general (e.g., neither request nor provide social security numbers or other confidential information). It is important on counseling web pages where information is exchanged to inform students whether the server is secure. Campus webmasters can provide information

about security and encryption; they can often help in making web pages/e-mails secure/encrypted, if they are not already.

Descriptions And Examples of Effective Online Counseling Services

Although face-to-face interaction may never be eliminated, there are many counseling services that can be effectively provided over the internet-with or without the use of a secure server. Consider the following examples of how to provide counseling services effectively online:

- **List the objectives, purpose, and process of counseling services.** For example, counselors at Central Piedmont Community College discuss how they help students define goals, assist with program planning, and connect students to the resources of the college (http://www.cpcc.cc.nc.us/ICAN/Counseling_Services/role.htm). Pamlico Community College defines their role as: to provide support services that are appropriate to the college service area and accessible to the students, faculty, staff (http://www.pamlico.cc.nc.us/pcc_student_services.htm).
- **Describe the counseling staff.** This may consist of a list of the staff, their credentials, phone numbers, e-mail addresses, and their areas of specialty. Describe where the counseling staff is located on campus. (http://www.blueridge.cc.nc.us/StudentServices/StudentSupport/CounselingServices.htm and http://cfcc.net/admissions/counseling.htm and http://www.robeson.cc.nc.us/studserv/Counseling/testing&.htm).
- **List external links to resources needed by students.** These links may be to services such as: social services, disabilities, domestic violence and sexual assault, substance abuse, and mental health. (http://www.forsyth.tec.nc.us/student/personal.html and http://www.pitt.cc.nc.us/students/student_services/counrefer.html). See **Resource Guide** for a listing of useful external links.
- **Include a Frequently Asked Question page.** Students may be interested in answers to questions such as: "Who is my counselor?" "How do I change my program of study?" and "What do I need in order to transfer to a four-year college?" This may include a section enabling students to ask questions. (http://technet.gtcc.cc.nc.us/services/FAQs/counsel.htm and

http://www.faytech.cc.nc.us/stuserv/counseling/FAQs/faskq1_home.html). Asking questions online can also be accomplished by listing the e-mail addresses of available counselors.

- **Provide information about a variety of topics important to students' mental and emotional health as well as their academic success.** This may include, for example, information about the college's drug and alcohol policy (http://www.isothermal.cc.nc.us/drugs.htm) or information about students' educational support plans (http://www.southwest.cc.nc.us/sss/ed-supp-plan.html). See **Resource Guide** for more useful links.
- **Include information about ethical and legal issues.** For example: "...the counseling staff adheres to the Ethical Standards of the American Counseling Association...". Also, include information about what to do in case of an emergency, such as call a 24-hour crisis hotline or 911. (http://www.nash.cc.nc.us/studdev/counserv.htm and http://www.faytech.cc.nc.us/stuserv/counseling/online/default2.htm). See **Resource Guide** for links to counseling associations and their ethical guidelines.
- **Provide testimonials from students.** (http://www.rccc.cc.nc.us/student-testimonials.html).
- **Post a "What's New!" page.** Post new information on a special page so that students know where to go to be apprised of new information. (http://www.surry.cc.nc.us/s_servic/Student%20Services/WhatsNew.htm).
- **Assist students in reporting online harassment.** (see for examples: http://www.faytech.cc.nc.us/stuserv/counseling/online/Default%20pages/harassment.htm; see **Resource Guide** for useful links regarding the report of harassment).
- **Design pages to help students evaluate the quality of online counseling services.** (http://www.faytech.cc.nc.us/stuserv/counseling/online/Default%20pages/online%20counseling%20evaluation.htm and http://www.pitt.cc.nc.us/ereport.html).

- **Provide pages to assist faculty in referring students to counselors.** (http://www.faytech.cc.nc.us/stuserv/counseling/online/faculty/faculty_referral.htm).
- **Provide online workshops.** Students can engage in online workshops pertaining to: stress management, test anxiety, study skills, etc. (See, for example, the American Personal Power Learning Experiences created at Appalachian State University: http://www.appleprof.com/).
- **Provide online orientation for students.** Online orientation can focus students on essential information to ensure their success (e.g., learn to use advisement, types of financial assistance available, and types of counseling services available see, for examples: http://www.broward.cc.fl.us/cyber/index.jsp and http://www.wncc.nevada.edu/orientation/ and http://cfcc.net/orientation/index.html).
- **Provide links with academic advising.** Although most community colleges distinguish between academic advising and counseling, the similarities in services provided make links between counseling and advising essential. (http://www.pima.edu/~coadmissions/advis.htm, http://www.cpcc.cc.nc.us/ican/, and a national advising association: http://www.nacada.ksu.edu/).
- **Provide services unique to international students**. Examples include an application for international students and admissions requirements for international students, (http://www.vgcc.cc.nc.us/forms/internationalstudents.htm and http://144.90.112.195/vac/a4fint.htm).

Useful Questions To Ask In Designing Online-Counseling/Advising Services[3]

1. What are the pros and cons of online counseling/advising from the perspective of established counseling theory and practice?

2. What matriculation services do you have online? (e.g., Application/Registration/Assessment/Orientation/Advising)

3. Describe some of the ways your advisors/counselors are currently using electronic technology with students.

4. How do you ensure document integrity and client confidentiality? Have your counselors expressed concerns about confidentiality when using email to communicate with students? If so what are concerns? What issues or topics are you sharing that are confidential? What steps have been taken to resolve this?

6. Have you found that online students have different kind of needs than on campus students?

7. What are appropriate and effective protocol/processes/guidelines when using technology in counseling or advising?

8. What obstacles/resistance/limitations in the use of technology in advising/counseling does your department encounter?

9. If counselors/advisors are concerned about technology replacing face-to-to contact with students, what is the reason (i.e. differentiated access, no home computer)?

10. Where do you see your department going and what recommendations would you make for future use of technology in advising/counseling?

11. How are counselors/advisors trained in technology on your campus?

12. Are advisors/counselors involved in the decision making process in choosing advising technology?

13. How effective is the technology in relation to student success? Has any research been compiled on your campus?

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[3] Andrea L Irby developed these questions. She is the Director of the Virtual Advising Center at NC State University (Andrea_Irby@ncsu.edu).

14. If your school offers online instruction, is there a student service component? Explain.

15. What is the role of paraprofessional in online student support services?

16. What applications of technology are currently available on your campus?

17. How are different software programs interfaced with the Web on your campus (for example, is BlackBoard software compatible with AOL)?

18. What does your counseling department have in terms of technology?
    a. Computers: Does each counselor have a computer? How old? How fast?
    b. Network Hardware?
    c. Program software
    d. Wiring infrastructure (wiring type, fiber optics, T-1, modem)?

19. How many students are taking online classes only?

20. How many students are taking a combination of online and on-campus courses?

Career Information

Careerware/ Bridges. Com
www.careerware.com

North Carolina State Occupational Information Coordinating Committee (SOICC)
http://www.soicc.state.nc.us/soicc/

Self-Assessment-North Carolina's Job & Career Navigator
http://www.esc.state.nc.us/NCJC/welcome3.htm

SOICC/ Career Briefs
http://www.soicc.state.nc.us/soicc/info/briefs.htm

NC Careers
http://www.nccareers.org
North Carolina's Career Information System for career explorers and job seekers.

College Connections

Articulation Agreement between NC Community Colleges and UNC System Universities
http://www.ga.unc.edu/student_info/caa/index.html

North Carolina Independent Colleges and Universities
http://www.ncicu.org/

University of North Carolina System (16 Campus)
http://www.northcarolina.edu/

College Foundation of North Carolina
http://www.cfnc.org

College Board
http://www.collegeboard.org

Pathways
http://www.cfnctraining.org//cc

Counseling Sites

Alcohol and other Drugs
http://www.uwstout.edu/resolve/aoda.html

A.P.P.L.E. (American Personal Power Learning Experiences)/ Appalachian State University
http://www.fd.appstate.edu/apples/

HealthyPlace.Com (mental health community)
http://healthyplace.com

Mental Health InfoSource
http://expert@mhsource.com

Self-Help:Academic Success
http://www.inform.umd.edu/CampusInfo/Departments/Counseling/Selfhelp/shacasu.htm

Self-Help: Assertiveness
http://www.inform.umd.edu/CampusInfo/Departments/Counseling/Selfhelp/shasser.htm

Self-Help:Depression
http://www.inform.umd.edu/CampusInfo/Departments/Counseling/Selfhelp/shdeprs.htm

Self-Help: Loneliness
http://www.inform.umd.edu/CampusInfo/Departments/Counseling/Selfhelp/shlonli.htm

Self-Help: Self-Esteem
http://www.inform.umd.edu/CampusInfo/Departments/Counseling/Selfhelp/shestm.htm

Self-Help:Stress
http://www.inform.umd.edu/CampusInfo/Departments/Counseling/Selfhelp/shstrss.htm

Financial Aid/ Scholarship

Fastweb: Scholarship and Financial Aid
http://www.fastweb.com/

Financial Aid
http://www.fafsa.org/

United Negro College Fund (UNCF)
http://www.uncf.org/Flash/index.html

College Foundation of North Carolina
http://www.cfnc.org

College Board
http://www.collegeboard.org

The North Carolina Community College System
http://www.nccces.cc.nc.us./Stu_Dev_Services/financial_aid.htm

North Carolina Community College Resources

NCCCS Locations and Phone Numbers
http://www.nccces.cc.nc.us/colleges_map.htm

NC at your Service Website
http://www.ncgov.com/html/basic/index.html

NCCCS Calendar of Events
http://calendar.ncgov.com/eventcenter-bin/msclient.dll?SESSION=0011750057&METHOD=TOP&NID=2547543&CMD=2

North Carolina Community College Resources
http://www.nccces.cc.nc.us/

North Carolina High School Information
http://www.dpi.state.nc.us/

Distance Learning Course Offerings at NC Community Colleges
http://www.nccces.cc.nc.us/folder/index.html

Professional Organizations

American Association of Community Colleges
http://www.aacc.nche.edu/

American Counseling Association
http://www.counseling.org/

American Counsel on Education
http://www.ACENET.edu/

National Board of Certified Counselors (NBCC)
http://www.nbcc.org/

North Carolina Association for Women in Community Colleges
http://ost.pitt.cc.nc.us/ncaawcc/

North Carolina Distance Learning Association
http://www.dlalliance.org/

Special Needs Students

ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act)
http://www.usdoj.gov/crt/ada/adahom1.htm

A.H.E.A.D. (Association on Higher Education and Disability)
www.ahead.org

Office of Civil Rights
http://ed.gov/offices/OCR/index.html

Disability Access, Information and Support
http://www.janejarrow.com

HEATH Resource Center
http://www.acenet.edu/programs/heath/home.cfm

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Testing

Accuplacer
http://www.collegeboard.com/accuplacer/html/accupla1.html

A.C.T.
http://www.act.org/

Kaplan Test Prep Information
http://www.kaplan.com/

T.O.E.F.L.
http://www.toefl.org/

Various Online Tests (Personality, Intelligence, etc.)
http://www.topix.com/~sean/tests.htm

Other Links/ Miscellaneous

Resources for Distance Learning
http://webster.commnet.edu/HP/pages/darling/distance.htm

Guide to Developing Online Student Services
http://www.wiche.edu/telecom/resources/publications/guide/guide.htm

SYSTRAN (This web site provides information about how to use their software to translate entire web pages into a variety of languages.)

http://www.systransoft.com/

Bobby (A free services used in identifying whether particular web pages are accessible to persons with disabilities.)

http://www.cast.org/Bobby/AboutBobby313.cfm

Stop It! (Extensive information on harassment, reporting procedures, and treatment interventions.)http://web.mit.edu/stopit

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